

1st Place (High Schools, 2023): Amber Lorigan, Whangārei Girls' High School, Unimaginable

He sat opposite me, the corner of his mouth quirking up into the beginning of a smile.

"All I want you to do is look at me, okay? Just look into my eyes."

"Okay, Mr Harper," I smirked back. "Let's see if your 'power' will work on me."

He leaned forward, his forearms resting on his knees as he gazed into my eyes. I became acutely aware of how closely he was watching me. Normally, I would begin to feel uncomfortable if someone was staring at me, yet his presence felt so calm and safe. But that didn't stop a part of me from still feeling suspicious of him, even if it was only because he might be insane.

My mind drifted back to the man before me, his eyes piercing mine, flecks of green visible in his otherwise warm caramel eyes. My thoughts blurred together, and everything around me seemed to go fuzzy. I tried to remain focused, but my mind refused to think clearly, almost as if someone had grabbed my thoughts and scattered them, leaving me to pick up the pieces. Suddenly a memory blazed in my head, of the two of us laughing and eating in a cafe, yet something felt off about it.

A loud snap brought me back to reality and the man sitting opposite me. My smile disappeared, along with my false sense of trust in him. A grin pulled on his lips at my sudden mood change, and he tilted his head at me playfully.

"Still don't believe in my power?" he murmured teasingly.

"What did you do?" I whispered. "How did you bring up that memory?"

His grin grew wider still, but that only frustrated me all the more. "Oh, don't you remember where that memory came from?" He asked, frowning with concern. Or perhaps he was mocking me. His eyes were throwing off my sense of reasoning.

"No...what are you talking about?" I looked at him uncertainly. He chuckled, humoured by my confused reaction. Okay, he was definitely mocking me.

"Well, it's pretty simple, darling. A little thing you might refer to as... mind manipulation. He arched his eyebrow for the grand effect, taking in my bewilderment. I shut my gaping mouth, feeling a scowl form at his smug expression.

"That's not possible." Dear Lord, why did I almost believe him?

"Well, what else do you think that was?" he whispered, reaching forward and tucking a rogue lock of hair behind my ear.

In any other situation, I would've rapped his knuckles, but my mind was still whirling from the abrupt memory. Surely, there was a reasonable explanation for it, right? Some sort of psychological trick, perhaps. But I couldn't shake the feeling of uneasiness that lingered around the edges of my mind.

